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ABSTRACT

This publication describes four school health programs from the standpoint of young people who participate in them. Its purpose is to indicate how committed staff members in comprehensive school health programs can help students to succeed. The publication identifies four well-respected programs in diverse settings that are using innovative approaches to improve the health and academic achievement of individual students, and reports on an encounter at each program site with a young person who has been helped by the program. A common theme among these narratives is the experience of growing up in an America far different from that of previous adolescent generations. Each account discusses situations and problems modern youth must confront, and describes how access to a network of professionals and helping adults can provide what these young people need for their passage through adolescence. The following programs are described: (1) the school-based Youth Services Program, New Brunswick (New Jersey); (2) Communities in Schools, San Antonio (Texas); (3) STAR (Student Taught Awareness and Resistance) Program, Kansas City (Missouri); and (4) Jackson-Hinds Comprehensive Health Center, Jackson (Mississippi). Each narrative includes photographs of its student subject in school and community settings. Program profiles, including contacts and addresses for further information, are appended. (AF)

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BEATING THE ODDS: FOUR STORIES

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BEATING THE ODDS: FOUR STORIES

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FORWARD

This publication is a unique contribution to the literature about school health programs for one important reason: The programs are described "through the eyes" of young people who participate in them.

Our purpose was to explain how committed staff members in comprehensive school health programs can help students to succeed — and we wanted to describe this in a concrete way. To do this, we identified four well-respected programs in diverse settings that are using innovative approaches to improve the health and academic achievement of individual students. At each program site, a writer and photographer talked with a young person who had been helped by the program. You will meet these remarkable young people within the pages of this book, and we hope that their stories will illustrate the kinds of services and other assistance that can make a real difference in young people's lives.

This book is being released at the same time as the report of the National Commission on the Role of the School and the Community in Improving Adolescent Health, which is co-sponsored by the National Association of State Boards of Education and the American Medical Association. It is our wish that Beating the Odds will help the public better understand the nature and benefits of comprehensive school health programs.

BEATING THE ODDS: FOUR STORIES

The young people you will meet in these pages tell different stories. The most important one, however, is of an experience they share — growing up in an America far different from that of adolescent generations before them. It is a "scarier world," as one parent told us. This is true for the most privileged as well as the least, for those in supportive schools and for those where problems overwhelm the structures for young people. In a revealing experience, the stark reality of young people's lives — and those who try to help them cope — followed our photographer, Michael Geissinger. As he went around the country visiting health programs, one school was helping students struggle with the suicide of a younger sibling; in another, the counselor was trying to prevent a youngster from doing the same thing.

Yet, the stories of these four young people also are affirming ones. They are coming through their adolescent years with their heads held high because, in each situation,their families and other caring people work together to make it happen. And through their school, each youngster found a helping adult to listen to them. Each has access to a network of professionals who see young people's wholeness. No family, no school, no one agency could alone provide what these individual young people need for their passage through adolescence. But together, their competence and compassion are making the world much less scary.

Kim Nichols still likes to take long walks alone or with a single friend. She doesn't yet have the puppy she wants. She shrugs off schoolwork as something to be merely tolerated, but her grades are climbing back up. In fact, her whole life is coming together again. The innocence of being a little girl is gone, but so is some of the fright of growing up misunderstood.

The Kim Nichols of the world are not supposed to be unhappy. She lives in South Brunswick, N.J., only 30 minutes from frenzied New York City by commuter rail. The community has its extremes, from trailer parks to wealthy enclaves, but for the most part its spacious homes and manicured yards reflect the

lives of those solidly in the middle class. Kim has two loving parents, a swimming pool in the backyard, summers at the beach.

However, for this pretty, friendly teenager and many of her classmates at South Brunswick High School, their suburban American Dream is a sham. Like the area itself, young people don't have a center to their lives — not just a place but a feeling of belonging. South Brunswick is not a community. It is an undefined, incoherent sprawl, hiding the struggle of families to fill the vacuum with something besides endless personal problems.

Eighty percent of the heavy caseload of the school-based youth services counseling at the high school concerns alcohol abuse in families. Most of the schools' families are either single parents or remarried couples trying to adjust to different relationships. With five potential suicides in consultation in an average week, Youth Services Director Leslie Hodes says wearily but passionately, "We're in the business of saving lives."

When Kim's fragile world came apart in her first year of high school, "I had no one to talk to." The only answer to such frustration and loneliness "was to go out and get into trouble, because I was angry, and I had nothing else to do." Like other teenagers in South Brunswick, she drifted to a local skating rink and shopping malls where it was easy to get into trouble.

Such emptiness for young people already had taken a heavy toll in Kim's family. Her older brother's addiction problems climaxed in a car accident several years ago that required a long rehabilitation; a metal plate still covers part of his skull. Preoccupied with his situation and fearful that the same thing might happen to her daughter, Carol Nichols became overly protective. Kim, who thrives on friendships, was not allowed to date, even to choose her own clothes.

Mother and daughter argued themselves into corners. Kim's grades slipped, and she missed more than 60 days of classes in her first year of

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high school. Admitting that "my big mouth gets me into trouble," she lashed out angrily at classmates whom she considered "stuck up," but everything she did just created more of the alienation she feared. Kim wanted to leave school.

A year and a half later, this 15-year-old was an academic star in her school-within-a-school class, thinking about what she would do after graduation, and learning to handle conflicts with her mother. Mrs. Nichols admits now that she was putting Kim "into a shell because of the problems with my son. I wasn't seeing her as a different person." Without the help they received from the school-based youth services program, she believes their problems would have grown worse and her family would have experienced another tragedy. "I've learned to give Kim some space in her life."

As trained clinicians, Hodes and her staff are filling an enormous need of the perceptibly privileged youngsters in South Brunswick. They literally "held Kim's hand" through many months of counseling,

helping her to say "no" to typical pressures on teenagers lacking self-esteem and to work out problems with her mother. She was an almost daily visitor at their offices. "I would go in there and pound my fists on the desk, instead of taking out my anger on someone else," she recalls.

It is very unusual to have problems at school without having problems at home, according to the Nichols' family counselor, Debbie Schiffman. "It is assumed that kids will acquire the skills of listening, coping and relating to others," she explains, but today "they too often learn dysfunctional ways of coping."

Principal at South Brunswick High for 16 years, Richard Kaye believes that society is pushing dysfunctional ways upon young people more and more. Unlike generations past, today's youth "lack constance in their lives, shared values, stability, time with adults." Schools could tell youngsters in trouble to "get your act together or we'll throw you out," Kaye says, "but you can't really threaten an adolescent to learn, especially when you are hurting, like so many of our students."

Hodes believes that what Kim and other students served in her center need the most "is the help of adults who don't judge them but help them make good decisions for themselves."

Kim is learning to do that, although she still is unsure of acceptance. She prefers a pick-up game of softball instead of playing with a team, will go for long walks instead of dropping in at the Teen Center started by Hodes' program, "but I may go when I get bored." She is thinking about what would make life for teenagers in South Brunswick better — a place for homegrown music groups to perform, field trips for young people, more opportunities for "kids to be honest about their feelings, instead of doing things to impress others." She understands better why her mother clamped down on her. Unlike the lonely, frustrating times of only a few months ago, Kim has hope that everything will be alright.

That is what her program is all about, Hodes believes.

As John Furness moves through the years at South San Antonio High School, fewer and fewer classmates return each year. The boys particularly drop out, never doing well enough to feel a part of school and drawn to quick cash in service jobs. By graduation time, one-third to one-half of John's class will be gone.

This soft-spoken, twinkle-eyed young man will graduate. Pushed by his mother and more determined than many of his classmates, John is overcoming barriers that turn away many Hispanic young people growing up in poverty.

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"These kids, they are angry." Counselor Omega Arteaga stresses the word "angry" slowly, then draws a verbal picture of the young students she helps at "South San" High School. "I can almost hear them saying, 'I have to fight so hard, if I'm going to get anywhere.'"

For the teenagers in her charge, fighting is not so much physical as it is emotional. They must deal with poverty, broken homes, the pressures from friends and families to take shortcuts to pleasures or to not care about education at all. It is a struggle for such young people to be different.

John is one of those students whose basic decency and potential tend to go unnoticed in a large high school. This is despite the fact that he takes a full load of academic courses, including an honors math class; plays in the band; and has a good grade point average. He is unlikely to share his problems with teachers and counselors overwhelmed by difficulties that are more dramatic than that of a youngster who stays out of trouble.

Living in a cramped apartment with his mother and two younger sisters, John does his homework after midnight when he returns from his job at a fast-food restaurant. While his mother would not tolerate the idea of him dropping out of school — "if you quit, you move out," she told him emphatically — he didn't see much more possible than short-term business school courses after graduation.

A few months into his junior year, he had not yet been counseled by the school on the steps he needed to take for college, such as entrance tests or financial aid possibilities. He was not aware of what was available or even of what questions to ask. Then, he learned about the Upward Bound program from a friend, and in only a few months, life changed considerably for him.

The change is due to Counselor Arteaga and the Upward Bound program. Arteaga's job is to keep up with about 50 students who want to attend college but whose problems could prevent them from even finishing high school. She will guide John through the college application and financial aid maze — and this is in addition to the extra academic preparation and career counseling that he will receive through the program.

John's mother was born and raised in Mexico, and he attended school across the border for several

her strong-willed mother. The boys wanted to go to "bars and clubs for grownups, where they just get into trouble." Some of her girlfriends "were claiming to be doing things, but I learned they were just talking."

Pregnancy was not infrequent among her classmates in the lower grades at Utica High School. In the 10th grade JoAnn chose to attend Hinds, the county's alternative and college-preparatory high school on the Utica campus of the Hinds Community College. She began to set high goals for herself. "I didn't want to go the same way as some of my friends," she says. And she couldn't disappoint her mother.

With the clinic staff always on hand to listen to her and more stimulating classes, JoAnn started shaping her future. Clinic staff were just as proud of JoAnn as her family when she was chosen for the

years. In another year he will become the first generation in his family to attend college. And his goal now is to be an engineer, not a fast-food manager. Giving up a weekend day that used to be his time to catch up on sleep, John attends the Upward Bound program at Our Lady of the Lake College on Saturdays. He hasn't missed a session because every one of them opens the window for him a bit more. "I'm learning that a lot of people can help me," he says. "I believe the opportunities are out there."

If young people get a sense that others care about them, "then they will care, too," says Arteaga. In a

large high school beset with multiple problems, students "who don't toot their own horns" likely will not get noticed, she adds.

Most of all, John has a chance to meet with students from other schools who come from similar situations — those with great potential and a will to "fight" their way out of the economic barrio. "We help each other," he says.

When John's mother was working the night shift at a restaurant, the number of young children on their own on downtown streets at night dismayed her. But, then, she says, "perhaps the streets often are safer places" because of the many problems children face at home.

"Kids need to be guided," she says. "You have to put thoughts in their heads." Despite often working

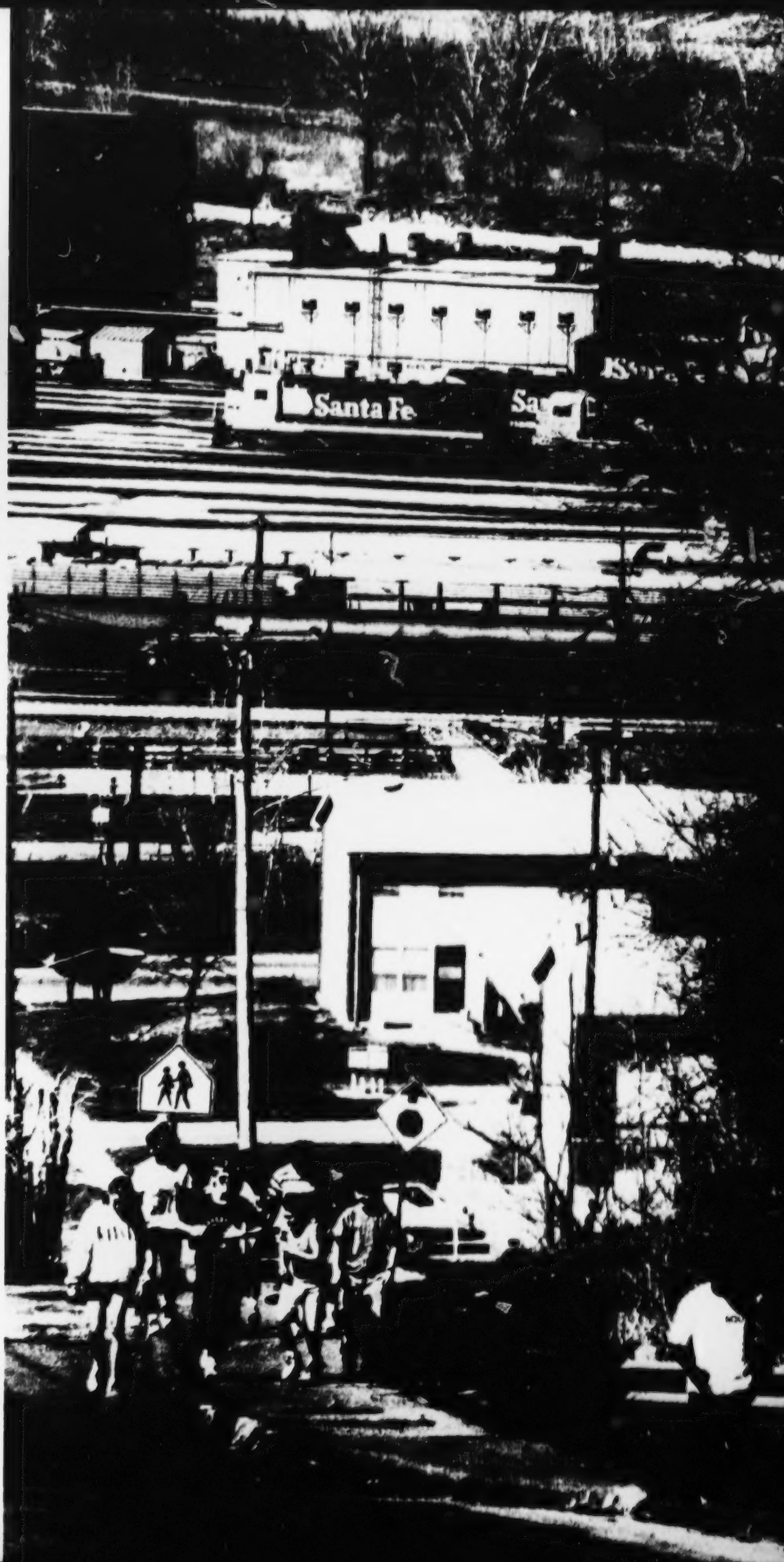
two jobs to make ends meet, Mrs. Furness "keeps on pushing" her children, and she is very proud of her son and his tenacity. "When John has a problem that he can't understand, he works double hard to solve it," she says. "He lives out my motto — give all you have, no matter how hard it gets." But the problems of planning and getting into college would have been overwhelming, she admits. Upward Bound "opened the door for him to go right through."

John hears lots of excuses from many of his friends for not trying hard to go to college. "They tell me it is a waste of my time because I might never make it," he says. He thinks it may take him longer than some young people, but he will, he is sure now, "make something of myself."

When Dwight Gipson walks down the hallways of the Argentine Middle School, he aims straight for his next class, with his head above others, a purpose to his stride, and friends flowing along with him.

"What a beautiful average kid," says his principal, Glen Schoenfish.

Dwight's parents and teachers are working very hard to keep this quiet, self-confident youngster — and his classmates from a rapidly changing Kansas City, Kansas, neighborhood — walking straight. Dwight is too young and protected to understand some of these changes. Yet, his mother and stepfather, aware of the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differences in the Argentine community since their childhoods there, know that Dwight cannot avoid confronting the problems that make growing up so hard for urban youngsters.

Argentine, like the city that surrounds it, is a solid blue-collar community, created by the industrial and railroad complex that lies below the steep hill where the middle school is perched. It was a good place to grow up, says Dwight's mother, DeeAnn Hootman, and still is for Dwight because of the extended family that surrounds him. Her husband agrees, but as a bus driver for an alternative school that enrolls many troubled youth, he knows that Dwight, right now, may be the exception. "Believe me," he says, "the temptations are out there."

But, slim, sandy-haired Dwight — well, he likes his neighborhood —"even though there isn't too much to do after school." He thinks Argentine School is becoming more interesting because of the mix of students. Its enrollment is now more than one-half black or new ethnic. However, Schoenfish also knows that where there are two-parent families, most often both are working, as are Dwight's parents. Many students live with only one parent or with relatives. More and more students are coming to school, he observes, without much to ground them in traditional values.

In a recent discussion in one of Vicki Estrada's social studies classes, for example, every student said they had seen family members or neighbors drunk from alcohol. How many parents would object if the student sneaked a beer out of the refrigerator? Only about one-half. How many had been tempted to drink? Almost all of them. How many had been offered a marijuana joint? About one-half.

"Gateway" drugs, especially alcohol but also tobacco, always tempt young teenagers. But, says Cathy Sillman, supervisor of alcohol and drug education programs for the school district, "kids are getting involved at an earlier age, engaging in drug talk earlier and talking about and using illegal drugs at younger ages."

Dwight, with an understanding beyond his 14 years, admits that "kids know what such stuff does to them." But they take it to get out of "reality," he

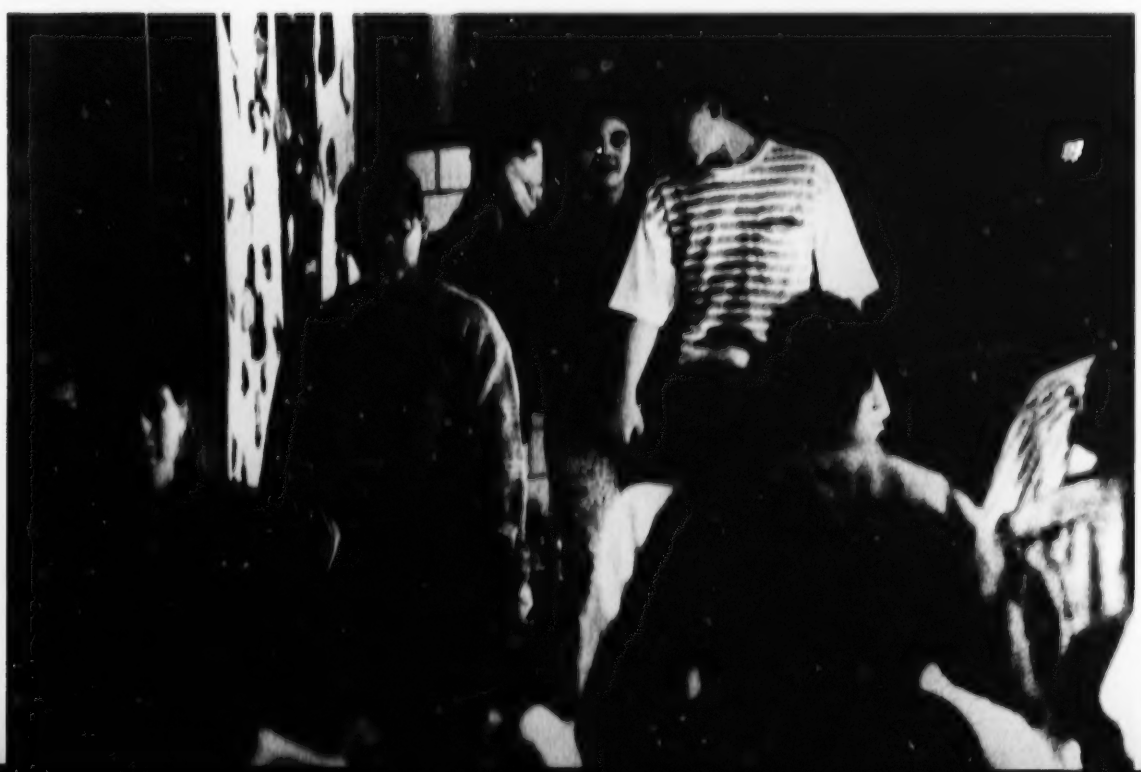
says, "and their parents tell them that they will get them out of trouble." Dwight would never be able to say that about his mother. She does her best to make sure he doesn't get into trouble. Raising Dwight on her own for many years, she keeps communication with her son open and constant. "I know mothers who would roll over before mentioning words like 'crack' or 'rubbers' to their sons," she says. "That kind of denial doesn't help young people today. It is a much scarier world." In her youth, "pot" was seen as a fairly harmless way to have fun; in Dwight's generation, crack kills them, she points out. "I want him to know that when something is not right for him, don't do it."

This frankness between son and mother is helped by the school's participation in Project STAR (Students Taught Awareness & Resistance). As an entering sixth grader, Dwight and his classmates, led by trained teachers, learned basic facts about drug abuse; then developed resistance skills through role playing, problem solving, and activities to help each other form positive values. (Playing the role of a cop, Dwight "busted" some classmates caught with chewing gum — drugs — when his class composed skits.) The project encouraged Dwight and his mother to openly discuss their attitudes toward drug abuse.

If Dwight seems unaffected by the allure of drugs, it may be because he took seriously what he and his classmates concluded about the consequences of drug use. "It may seem like a cool idea at first," says Dwight, "but that's not what it becomes." It was a relief, he felt, for some of his classmates to talk openly about addiction and realize others had such problems at home.

Dwight's own modest home is crammed with his life — an aquarium, books on science fiction, violin, sports equipment of all kinds, and the telephone that rings with a check-up call from his mother every day right after school. If there is no sports practice at school, he and his friends usually play pick-up ball at the community's recreation center.

But he knows of many classmates who don't stay busy and who need someone to listen to them. It may be difficult for them to say "no" when the inevitable "scary world" crosses their lives. Dwight, however, doesn't even worry about that.



JoAnn Craft inherited her mother's grit.

Without it and a lot of hand-holding from her family, teachers, and counselors, she might have taken the path of so many friends around Utica, Mississippi, decisions that would have kept her in the rural poverty that seems like a Third World plunked down in the middle of the South.

Instead, a self-confident JoAnn has big plans for herself. She not only wants to go to college, but all the way through graduate school. And, it would be nice, she adds, to be able to have "one night on the Broadway stage" on the way to her doctorate.

Broadway is a long way from tiny Utica, about 40 miles southwest of Jackson and JoAnn's home since she was a toddler. What isn't rusty in Utica is boarded up except for a few small stores and a handful of homes. Utica High School, the largest building in town, was condemned five years ago but still is in use. "I don't know why the roof hasn't fallen in," says one parent.

Eighteen-year-old JoAnn lives out from town, with her ailing mother, a brother and occasional other members of the family, in a house with no indoor plumbing. She carries a full freshman load of courses at Hinds Community College and works full-time as a cashier.

Her mother raised her 12 children — JoAnn is the youngest — in and around Utica, most of the time separated from her husband. She worked sometimes six or seven days a week as a nurse's aide, or cleaning house or picking pecans for the local groves. "I only asked the good Lord for what was reasonable," she says.

Hazel Craft also encouraged her children to go as far as they could. Ten graduated from high school, and most enrolled in college. "I never tell the kids what I can't do," she says. "I am always going to give what needs to be done a try."

JoAnn shows this same determination. But in rural Mississippi, it hasn't been easy for her. One thinks of close, family-centered rural life as supportive; yet, it is being eroded by poverty that won't go away and the same problems that now destroy families in the cities.

"Young people just don't have any adults to relate to in a positive sense," says Dr. Aaron Shirley, Project Director of the Jackson-Hinds Comprehensive Health Center. "They are hungry for someone to show attention to them." Once, he explains, older siblings gave "good information" to younger ones about "jobs, and the birds and bees, and fitting in." Now, "pushers and pimps have filled a void, and they are deliberately targeting kids in rural areas."

Dr. Shirley and the professionals who work in the school-based clinics run by his project see young people selling themselves to buy drugs, risking the spread of AIDS, which is now increasing faster among adolescents in the county than in any other population.

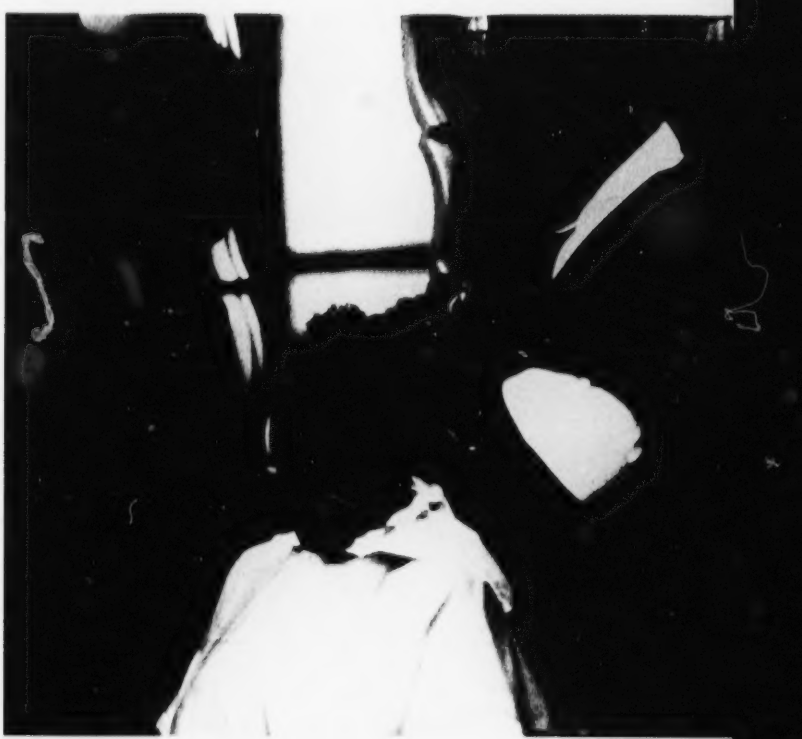
JoAnn's high school principal, Charles Langston, also believes the fabric of rural families is disintegrating. "The good, strong male image is disappearing," he says, "and it is not as easy as in the past to inspire kids to get out of the bad conditions they have been raised in."

At the satellite rural clinic in the Hinds Agricultural High School, JoAnn found help for minor medical problems, free dental work, and, most of all, someone to listen to her when she had personal problems. Attractive, vivacious — and so sincere that "she was very gullible," according to one of her counselors, Juanita Davis — JoAnn was under teen-age pressures which she couldn't discuss with

top honor in the school, "Miss Hinds," and became the school's spokesperson for a year.

JoAnn was accepted at colleges away from home, but she needs to help support her mother and wants more time to think about what she will do. Like many teenagers, she dreams of going on stage. Like few from the countryside around Utica, she will try for an academic career. Psychology might be what she chooses because "I want to understand why my father (now deceased) could have become such an abusive person."

Above all, she believes it when the teachers and counselors and family surrounding her "say they want to see me make it in life."



South Brunswick, New Jersey. School-based Youth Services Program.

The New Jersey School-Based Youth Services Program began in 1988 as a state-planned effort to provide comprehensive services to teenagers in their schools. Twenty-nine sites, with at least one in each county, now operate out of high schools and vocational schools. They are teamed with one or more outside agency. Each center may develop its own program; however, each also must provide five basic services — mental health and family counseling, health and substance abuse services, employment counseling and training services, information and referral services, and recreation. Parental approval is needed in order for the young people, ages 13-19, to receive services. Initial funding for the program, developed by the state's Department of Human Services, was $6 million.

Impetus for the program came from information the state gathered about the status of teenagers. It found a high incidence of substance abuse, teenage pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, dropouts, and teenage unemployment. Suicide was the second leading cause of death among New Jersey adolescents; about 1,000 young people were treated for mental illness each year in residential centers or hospitals.

The South Brunswick School-Based Youth Services Program provides all of the required services, concentrating on needs of young people in its area for counseling and recreation. At urban sites, the emphasis might be more on health education and services for teenage mothers. The sites cannot pay for contraceptives, but each one can decide about whether or not to offer family planning.

At the South Brunswick site, both individual and group counseling are offered, as well as a wide range of health and referral services. Its cooperating agency is the Community Mental Health Center of the University of Medical and Dentistry of New Jersey.

A major activity is the Teen Center, attracting up to 300 students a week to recreational and academic activities. It operates year-round in the school building and is run by a student board. The site also has a job/career counselor. Under this program, South Brunswick has started a project to employ high school students as tutors of elementary school students.

Outreach services at South Brunswick include workshops on parenting skills and special counseling for school dropouts.

The placement of the School-Based Youth Services Program in the same complex with the school's counseling and career center gave it immediate visibility and accessibility. This also underscored the rationale for the program — coordinated services in one place. The integration of the program with school services was aided by the director's previous background as a special education coordinator with the public schools.

For further information: Leslie Hodes, Director, South Brunswick School Based Youth Services Program; South Brunswick High School, Major Road, P.O. Box 183, Monmouth Junction, NJ 08852; (201) 329-4044.

Communities in Schools. San Antonio,Texas.

The Upward Bound Program at South San Antonio High School is just one of many efforts by the Communities in Schools program to bring community-wide efforts to bear on the problems that cause students to drop out of school.

In cooperation with Our Lady of Lake College, the Upward Bound program offers promising but at-risk high school students an opportunity to reinforce academic learning, career counseling, college information and application assistance, visits to college campuses, and a summer residential program. It also provides individual counseling. Students participating in the program must be the first generation in their families to attend college

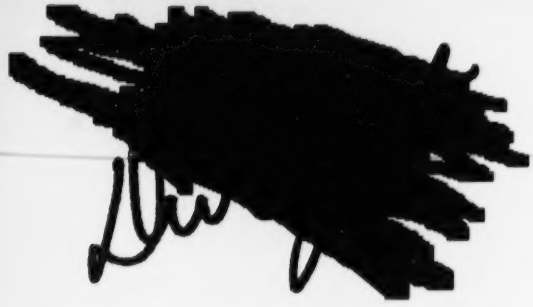
The San Antonio program itself is part of a statewide Communities in Schools effort now operating at 12 sites. They are private, nonprofit organizations working in partnership with public schools, businesses, human service agencies, volunteer, and community organizations.

In the San Antonio program, students and families have a wide range of services, based on six components: remedial instruction, counseling, health, employment, enrichment, and parental involvement. Each student entering the program is given a personal assessment to decide what services are needed. The students are referred to the program by teachers, counselors, social service agencies, probation officers, parents, or even other students. The program exists in those schools identified as the neediest by the participating school districts; the schools provide office space, phone service, and utilities for the Communities in Schools staff. The program provides counselors for individual and group counseling, stay-in-school activities, drug abuse prevention programs, referrals to agencies, classes for parents, and activities tailored to each school's particular needs.

San Antonio's Communities in Schools program also is working closely with the business community to provide several types of summer experiences for teenagers. Not only will the program offer summer job opportunities, but it also will provide young people with information on future job growth in the metropolitan area in a special project, Job Explosion 2000.

The role of Communities in Schools in San Antonio, according to Maria Farrington, Executive Director, is to be case managers that can link children and young people to available services. All of its efforts, including academic work, are directed at keeping young people in school. In the 1988-89 school year, the program operated in six schools and reached more than 1,200 students. Ninety-five percent of the students involved in Communities in Schools stayed in school, with an average cost of less than $400 per student.

For further information: Maria Farrington, Communities in Schools, Inc., 9123 Lorene St., San Antonio, Texas, 78279-1049; (512) 349-9094.



STAR Program. Kansas City, Missouri.

STAR (Students Taught Awareness and Resistance) is a process, not a set curriculum. Instead of imposing a set of values on young people, structured discussion leads them to value-setting through personal learning experiences.

Shaken by the drug arrests of several members of the Kansas City Royals in 1983, co-owner Ewing Kauffman, founder of the Marion Laboratories, Inc., decided to place his resources behind drug prevention for young people. Through the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, the STAR project receives more than $500,000 a year, and the consistent support has allowed the project to develop a strong evaluation component.

Calvin Cormack, Executive Director of STAR and a former school administrator in the Kansas City, Missouri, area, was given the responsibility to find a drug prevention program that works. He selected a program based on the principles of the anti-smoking program of the Minnesota Heart Health Institute. The University of Southern California developed a method to evaluate STAR's impact; with surveys, breath tests, and other measures, the project has documented long-term success in helping students resist alcohol and other drug use. The program is used throughout Kansas and Missouri and is now being implemented in Indiana, the District of Columbia, and elsewhere.

Focusing on seventh-grade students, the STAR process is taught by specially trained classroom teachers (1,000 had been trained through the 1988-89 school year), as well as principals, nurses, and school counselors. Lessons deal with such themes as the consequences of using drugs, techniques for saying "no," how to resist peer pressure, student perceptions/misperceptions of drug use, the techniques and effects of advertising, developing friendships, and making informed decisions. A shorter reinforcement program occurs in the eighth grade, and the program is in the process of developing a ninth-grade phase.

STAR seeks to promote communication between students and their parents, and several of the themes include "homework" assignments to stimulate discussion about drug use and abuse. STAR also emphasizes that drug abuse prevention must be a community effort. As part of its process, it initiates community-school task forces on alcohol and other drug prevention, trains parents and community leaders to become part of a prevention climate, supports alternatives to alcohol and other drug use, promotes employee assistance programs at work sites, and brings community programs and agencies together to work on the problems.

The evaluation process involves 20,000 students each year from 15 school districts in the Kansas City area. Results have been used by the developers to modify the program. Three years after students received resistance skills, they show significant reduction in tobacco and marijuana use and a significant decrease in the amount of alcohol consumed at any one time.

For further information: Calvin Cormack, STAR, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation and Marion Laboratories, Inc., 9300 Ward Parkway, P.O. Box 8480, Kansas City, MO., 64114, (816) 363-8604.

Jackson-Hinds Comprehensive Health Center. Jackson, Mississippi.

Dr. Aaron Shirley, the first black pediatrician in Mississippi, began his community health clinics two decades ago with one site no larger than a closet and an outfitted bus. He had realized in private practice that he could not meet the many needs of his indigent patients; they needed comprehensive services that focused on prevention. He explains: "It often is hard to tell how much people are hurting when their problems don't have anything to do with needles and prescriptions."

More than 10 years ago, his program began collaborating with schools because the clinical services were not reaching children and young people soon enough. Today, there are nine school-based clinics in Dr. Shirley's project, serving 4,500 young clients each year throughout Hinds County. At the one elementary school site, the clinic also serves preschoolers from the neighborhood.

The initial purpose of the school-based clinics was to reach young adolescents whose needs were not being met in terms of medical services, emotional stress, the building of self-confidence and values, and "the security of knowing that there was someone who cared and who would listen to their problems in confidence."

Originally only in high schools, the project moved to junior high schools when clinic staff realized that early pregnancies were occurring among younger and younger students.

A student who becomes registered with a clinic (under parents' permission) completes a medical history; basic medical tests; and a psychosocial assessment to determine risk levels for drug or substance abuse, violence, suicide, pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease, accidents, and family conflict. The young person also receives routine dental care. Acute medical and dental care always is available; after satellite clinic hours or on weekends, students may contact staff at the main clinic building in Jackson.

The pregnancy prevention program focuses on education in individual or group sessions. Students determined to be at risk for pregnancy are referred to a nurse for family planning counseling; contraceptive services are available on a volunteer basis to every student requesting them. Health education consists of information on specific problems, such as taking medications or preventing acne; and "rap sessions" in small groups on such subjects as anatomy and physiology of the reproductive system, sexual values, parenting, and drug and alcohol abuse. A special project provides AIDS education programs.

The school-based clinics also provide individual counseling and services for student mothers, such as early prenatal care. Through a day care program, the clinic staff encourages mothers to stay in school and to prevent a second pregnancy.

For further information: Dr. Aaron Shirley, Jackson-Hinds Comprehensive Health Center, P.O. Box 3437, Jackson, Miss. 39207; (601) 362-5321.

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